

BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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Bahá'í International Community statement
to the

United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention
of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities'

Working Group on Indigenous Populations
Seventh session
31 July - 4 August 1989

Agend item 5: Standard-setting activities: evolution of standards
concerning the rights of indigenous populations

Geneva, 3 August 1989

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes this further step in the standard-setting process, and congratulates the Rapporteur, Ms. Erica-Irene Daes, for her work which has led to this revised draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1989/33) now before us. We wish to offer some general comments on the content of the draft declaration and then to make a proposal to enhance the drafting process.

We wish first to stress the importance of the protection and natural development of culture, as commented on in Part II of the draft declaration. This protection of culture not only allows indigenous peoples to develop their potential, but it further allows them to make their unique contribution to society, and prevents society's diversity from disappearing into uniformity.

Indigenous peoples have protected and nurtured certain characteristics within their cultures - characteristics that are extremely vital to a healthy and viable world community. They have strongly developed, for example, respect for all created things, the sense of kinship, brotherhood and unity, appreciation of spiritual values, cooperation, sharing and consultation. These are all characteristics that the rest of the world needs to appreciate as it moves forward into a multi-faceted and diversified global society. A dynamic process weaving threads of the past with those of the future will produce patterns and designs useful not only to future generations of indigenous peoples, but to everyone.

By their example, indigenous peoples will make a contribution to the evolution of the global community. The protections provided for in this evolving document of the Working Group will be instrumental in facilitating this contribution.

This challenging process leads to the issue of education. The Bahá'í International Community believes strongly that the achievement of literacy by all the people of the world is imperative. Literacy in the indigenous language facilitates not only the protection of the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, but also its development.

Although the draft declaration already addresses a wide range of issues, the Bahá'í International Community would like to suggest one more: the inclusion in Part II of reference to indigenous peoples' use of the mass media. For sustained cultural development, indigenous peoples must have access to all forms of communication and educational materials, including the opportunity to utilize the mass media. The experience of Bahá'í indigenous peoples in the design and use of radio communication in a number of places in the world provides abundant proof that this can nurture the flourishing of indigenous languages and oral traditions, the expression of cultural arts, and the expansion of knowledge of and response to community needs.

Along these lines, we hope to see governments implement educational programmes, as provided in draft Article 11, which encourage pride in and respect for the diverse cultures of the world, aimed at eliminating prejudice and fostering understanding and good relations.

The Bahá'í International Community very much welcomes the consultative process through which this draft declaration is being prepared and commends the Rapporteur on her personal efforts to provide information to as many indigenous people as possible in her travels and other interactions. We would furthermore encourage the participation and input of those peoples not yet represented in the session of the Working Group. We note that the Chairman/Rapporteur felt that "in view of the small number of replies received from all parties concerned, these cannot be considered as reflecting the views and proposals of a sufficient number of Governments and indigenous peoples of the international community" (document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1989/33). We would like to propose that consideration be given to obtaining the contributions of a broader spectrum of organizations and groups during the intervening year leading up to the article-by-article consideration of the draft declaration at the eighth session of the Working Group in 1990, in order to ensure the universality of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Bahá'í International Community hopes that these thoughts will contribute to the all-important standard-setting activities of this Working Group on Indigenous Populations.
